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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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Author(s): Whiteley, D.

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BOOK NEWS
AND REVIEWS



Reptiles and Amphibians

I have just received three new and very useful publications from the British Herpetological Society, which should be of interest to members curating herpetological collections or answering public enquiries about British amphibians and reptiles.

'A Guide for the Identification of British Amphibians and Reptiles' by John Buckley is a handy little field or lab. guide to adult animals, spawn, tadpoles, and sloughed snake skins. It covers all the native British species plus the well established aliens Marsh Frog, Pool Frog and Edible Frog.

It was nice to see the plug on page 1 "Biologists working in local museums are usually able to assist amateurs with the identification of specimens and they also like to receive records for their data banks". Single copies are 50p each, but if you buy 20 or more the price is 30p each, which makes it worth selling over the counter at the museum, or giving out to contributors to your own reptile and amphibian surveys. (Postage extra)

'Garden Ponds as Amphibian Sanctuaries' and 'Being Kind to Snakes' are both advisory leaflets issued by the B.H.S. Conservation Committee, packed with useful information about the construction and maintenance of garden ponds, establishment of breeding amphibians and requirements of each species. The snake leaflet provides the real facts about a group of animals which have received an undeserved bad press since just after The Creation.

Again, these leaflets are suitable for slipping into any letter answering an enquiry about herptiles. I tend to be asked for all sorts of advice ranging from setting up ponds for frogs, to refereeing annual contests between greedy goldfish and over-zealous frogs in spring. The S.F.S.F.S. (Sheffield Frog Spawn Flying Squad) is always busy redistributing excess spawn at this time of year. Anyway, back to the leaflets, which I'm sure will prove to be most useful hand-outs and invaluable handy references.

Derek Whiteley

No price given, but enquiries will be received by:

The Chairman, Conservation Committee
British Herpetological Society
Zoological Society of London
Regent's Park
London NW1

THE BRITISH HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The British Herpetological Society was founded in 1947 with the broad aim of catering for all aspects of interest in reptiles and amphibians. Initiated by a small number of enthusiastic and well-known naturalists, including the first president and author of the standard textbook on British herpetofauna, Dr Malcom Smith, the Society expanded rapidly and today enjoys national status with many international connections.

Activities of members range over a number of interrelated fields. In many cases the prime interest is in maintaining, breeding and observing various species in captivity and the Society acts as a forum for the interchange of experiences in this area. Others are concerned with the observation of animals in the wild state. There are active sub-committees which help to cater for these various tastes: the *Captive Breeding Committee* and the *Conservation Committee*. The former encourages the development of effective breeding techniques for captive specimens, thus providing animals for observation and study in vivaria, while simultaneously reducing the need to take fresh stock from wild and possibly declining populations. The Conservation Committee is actively engaged in field study, conservation management and political lobbying with a view to improving the status and future prospects for our native British species. It is the accepted authority on the conservation of reptiles and amphibians in the U.K. and has an advisory role to the Nature Conservancy Council (the statutory government body).

Meetings

About ten meetings covering a broad sphere of interests are held each year.

Publications

British Journal of Herpetology, published twice yearly, each June and December, contains papers of original research in herpetology.

British Herpetological Society Bulletin, also published each June and December, contains notices, news items, articles and original papers on all aspects of herpetology.

The Care and Breeding of Captive Reptiles, a book containing a collection of papers on recent developments in breeding reptiles in captivity. This publication is not included in members' subscriptions, but is available to members at a price of £3.00. Purchase orders should be sent to the Chairman of the Captive Breeding Committee.

Information sheets are produced on the care of reptiles and amphibians in captivity. These are continuously added to and updated.

Library

A reference library of books and journals is maintained for the use of members. The Society conducts exchanges of journals and bulletins with numerous foreign societies and institutions and in this way makes available to members a wide variety of current research, news, and general information.

Junior Section

This section, organised by the Society's Education Officer, caters for members of the ages 9-17. Junior members pay a reduced subscription and receive the *Bulletin* and a *Junior Newsletter* which is produced three times a year. The Junior Section also has an S.A.E. advisory service for its members in order to provide expert advice on any specific problems.

Subscriptions

Ordinary members £10.00 Junior members £3.00 Institution and Library rate £17.00

All subscriptions become due on the first day of January each year.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

I am interested in the objects of the above Society and wish to become a member. I agree to abide by the rules of the Society.

Date Signature

Name
(BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE)

Address

I enclose the sum of £.....

Branch of interest in Herpetology:

Any Remarks:

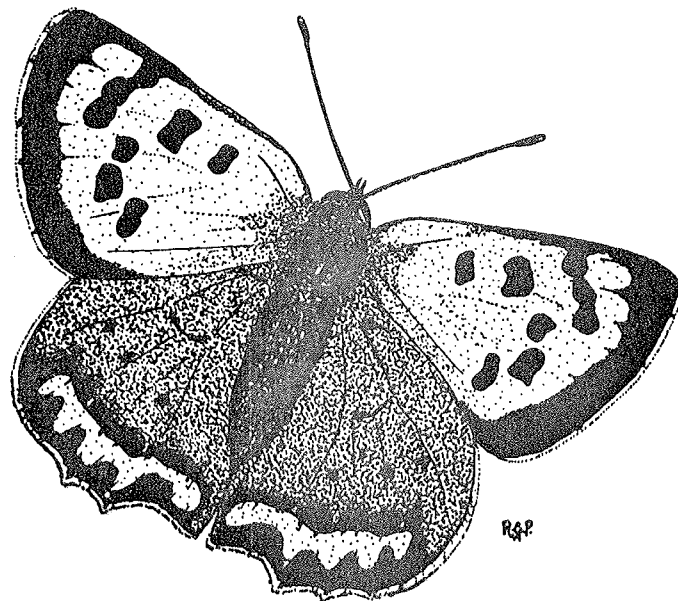
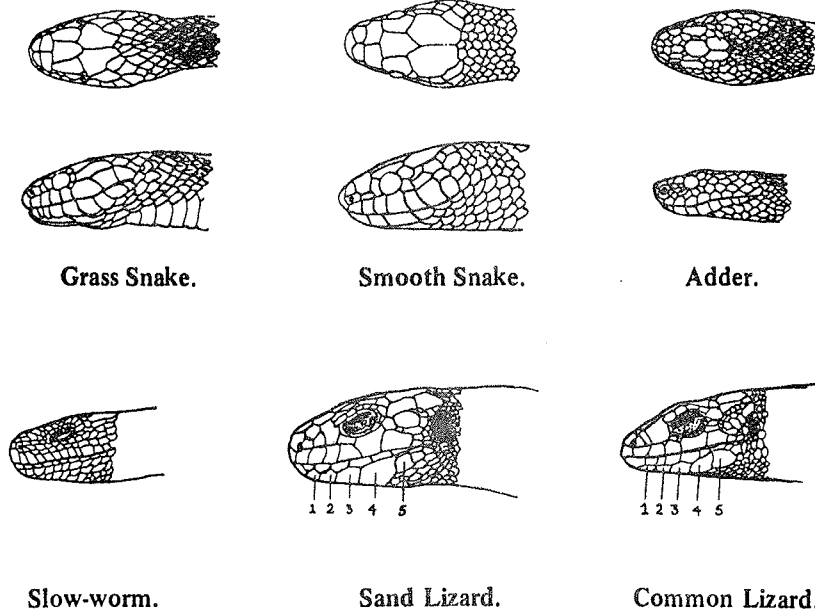
The completed application form should be sent to:
The Secretary

THE BRITISH HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY
c/o Zoological Society of London
Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY.

SLOUGHED SKINS

Reptiles shed their skins periodically and in the process the sloughed skin becomes turned inside out. These skins can easily be identified by the size and arrangement of the scale even when the animals' darker markings are not visible on them. The head scales (shields) are most useful for making a positive identification and they are shown in the drawings below.

FIG. 21 Head Scales. (Drawings not all to same magnification)



SMALL COPPER

Butterflies

Two booklets summarising the status and distribution of butterflies at a local level have been published by museum-based record centres during the past year, to coincide (accidentally or deliberately?) with Butterfly Conservation Year.

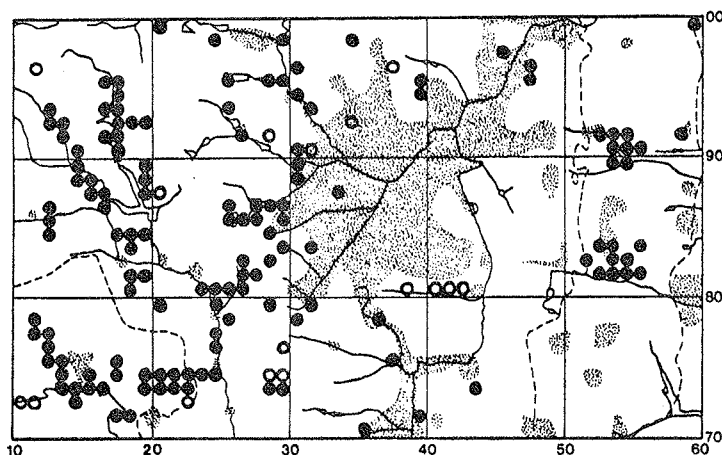
Butterflies of the Sheffield Area
by Steve Garland. Foreword by John Heath
Sorby Record Special Series No. 5

The latest edition in a series of faunal handbooks summarises butterfly records for the Sheffield Area, including South Yorkshire and north Derbyshire, from Victorian times to the present day. Special features of the book include:-

- a list of larval foodplants for each of 52 local species
- an account of present and past distribution, changes in numbers and relevant records for each species
- accurate 1 km² dot distribution maps for 20 common species showing post-1970 and older records at a glance
- histograms illustrating flight periods of 25 butterflies based on local records
- a free transparent overlay with each book, showing maps of geography, geology and altitude. It fits exactly over the species maps allowing readers to draw their own conclusions about distribution.

An introductory section on Butterfly habitats, and an extensive reference list complete the book, which is a credit to the thousands of records submitted by Sorby N.H.S. members, and other local entomologists. Here is Sheffield's contribution to 1981 - "Year of the Butterfly".

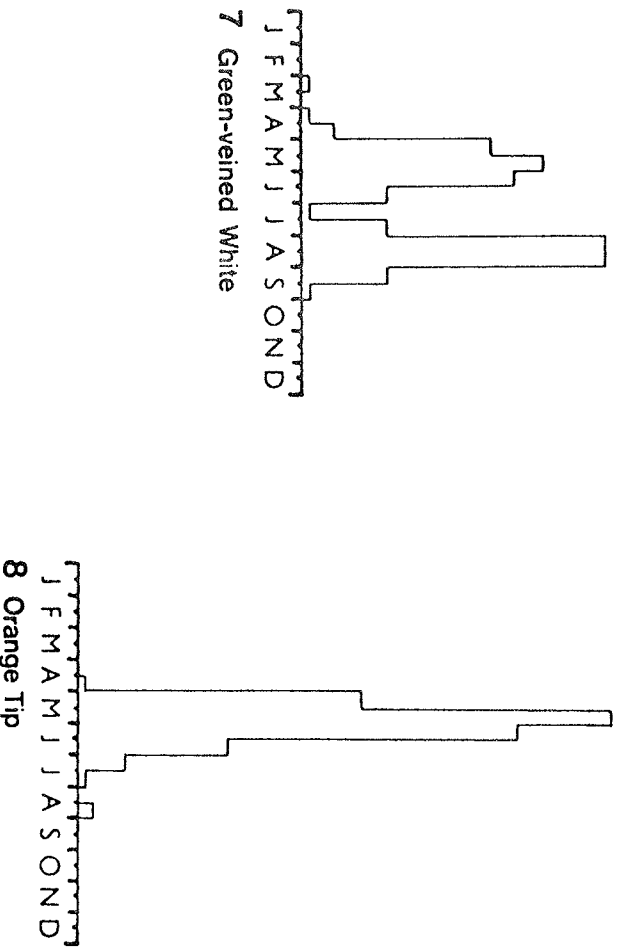
Published jointly by Sorby Natural History Society and Sheffield City Museums at 90p + 20p by post, available from Sheffield City Museum, Weston Park, Sheffield S10 2TP.



24
Small
Heath

Hesperiidae - Skippers
 There are eight resident British species of which four are currently breeding in the Sheffield area. They are the most primitive of the butterflies and are very moth-like in appearance.

Pieridae



Histograms of Flight Periods

A graphical representation of the flight period is far more useful than a statement that a species flies, for example from May to July. Records have been totalled for each half-monthly period over twenty years from 1960 to 1980 and plotted for twenty-five species. The vertical axis rises one millimetre for each record. This technique clearly illustrates the peaks and lulls in population numbers and in several cases reveals that the brood cycles in the Sheffield area may well differ from those generally accepted to be true.

Map 5 Graph 1

Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris* (Poda)
 Foodplants: Grasses including Creeping Soft-grass, Yorkshire Fog, Timothy, Tor Grass and Slender False-brome.

Around Sheffield the Small Skipper appears to have been rare before 1900 with localities including Maltby and Royston. It was very common at Thorne in 1903 but seems to have been absent from the rest of the area. In 1938 it was described as 'very local and scarce', but there were records about ten years later at Ewden, Dore and Limb Valley. Recolonisation of the area was first noticed in 1967 when one was seen at Hazelbarrow Farm in the Ford Valley. Since then it has increased in numbers and range until during 1979 and 1980 it was recorded more often than the Large Skipper. It now occurs throughout the mapped area in most grassland and scrub habitats, except on the higher ground and in urban areas and it is single brooded. The caterpillar over-winters and adults fly from June to September with a peak population in early August. Pale tips to the undersides of its antennae serve to distinguish it from the Essex Skipper (Fig. 1).
 (Brady 1884, Feamehough 1938, Harrison 1971a)

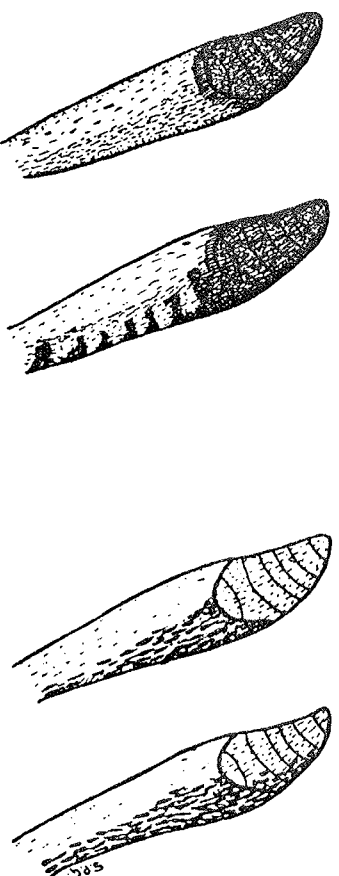


Figure 1. Underside of antennae tips.

Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola* (Ochsenheimer)
 Foodplants: Grasses including Couch and Timothy.

The only record of Essex Skipper near Sheffield was at Clumber in 1880. It is at present known from Lincolnshire and may spread into the eastern fringe of our area, so any Small Skippers seen in the east should be checked closely. The antennae are obviously dark-tipped on the underside (Fig. 1).
 (Barrett 1893)

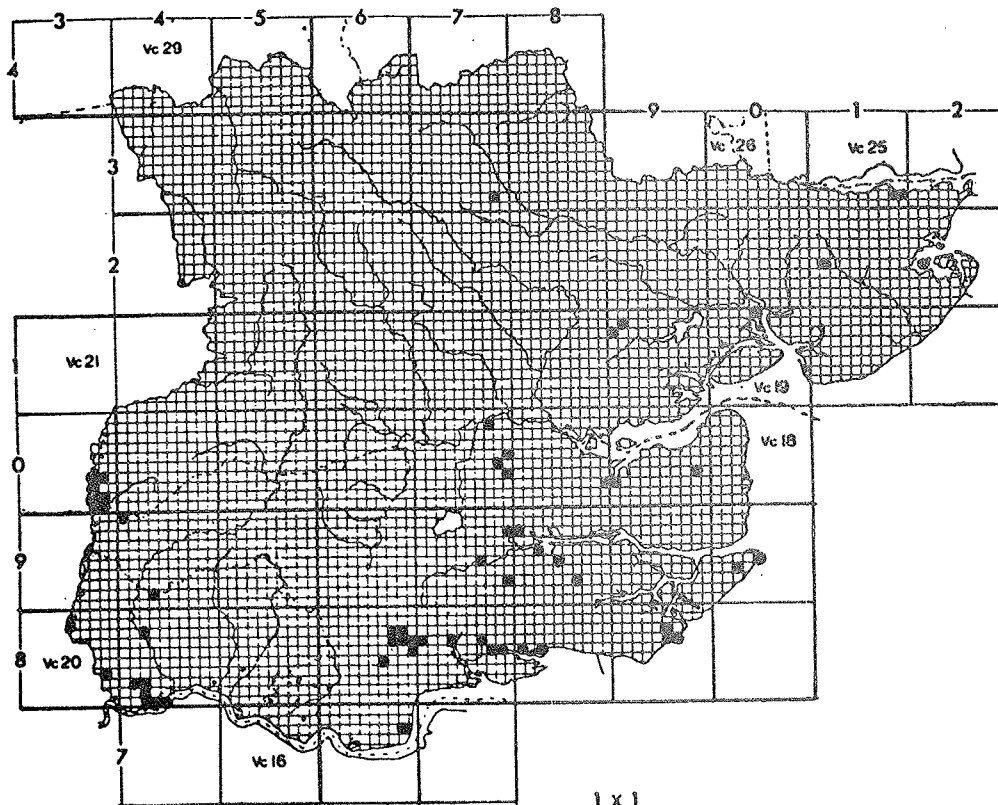
Butterflies of Essex. Provisional Maps

Essex Biological Records Centres Publication no. 1

The three main Local Biological Records Centres in Essex have combined resources, expertise and records to produce what is hoped will be the first of a long series of county publications. The book is well produced, and contains a status account for each species accompanied by a 10 km² distribution map. In addition 25 species have been mapped at the 1 km² level, based on records received during the period 1970-1981, providing a more detailed index to localities. Some maps are a little patchy, but as the authors clearly state "they do not pretend to be definitive, they merely provide a base for future recording".

Size A4. 26 p.p. including maps, illustrations. Available at 90p (+ postage) from R. G. Payne, Southend Central Museum.

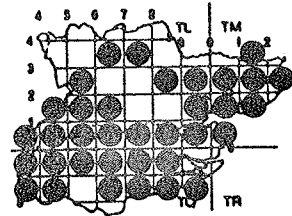
ESSEX SKIPPER



Family HESPERIIDAE

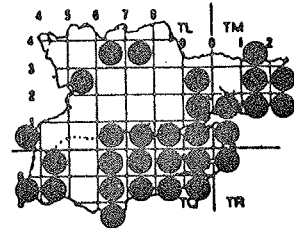
SMALL SKIPPER *Thymelicus sylvestris* Poda

Common and widely distributed, though under-recorded. It is found in meadows, roadside verges, marshes and woodland rides. The larvae feed on various grasses, such as Yorkshire Fog and Slender Brome Grass.



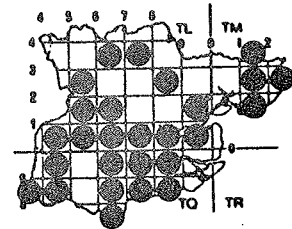
ESSEX SKIPPER *Thymelicus lineola* Ochs.

The true home of this species is in S.E. England. Although it flies in a variety of undisturbed grassy places it is particularly common along sea walls, and in rough grassy places near salt marsh. Although under-recorded, the distribution seems to show a southern and eastern trend corresponding to coastal or estuarine areas. The larval foodplants include various grasses such as Yorkshire Fog, Couch Grass and Slender Brome Grass. The flight period extends from early July to early September.



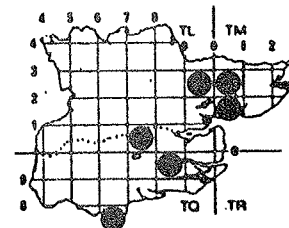
LARGE SKIPPER *Ochlodes venata* Brem. and Grey

Common and widely distributed, though under-recorded. It is found in meadows, roadside verges and woodland rides. The larvae feed on coarse grasses such as Cock's-foot and Couch Grass. Its flight period is from late June through July.



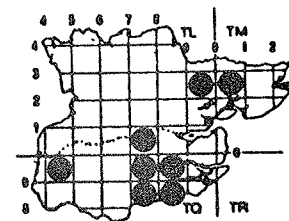
DINGY SKIPPER *Erynnis tages* Linn.

Very localised and rare. It frequents dry grassy places, hillsides, railway banks and open woodland. It may be under-recorded and is worth looking for. Its food plant is Bird's-foot Trefoil and it is on the wing during May and June.



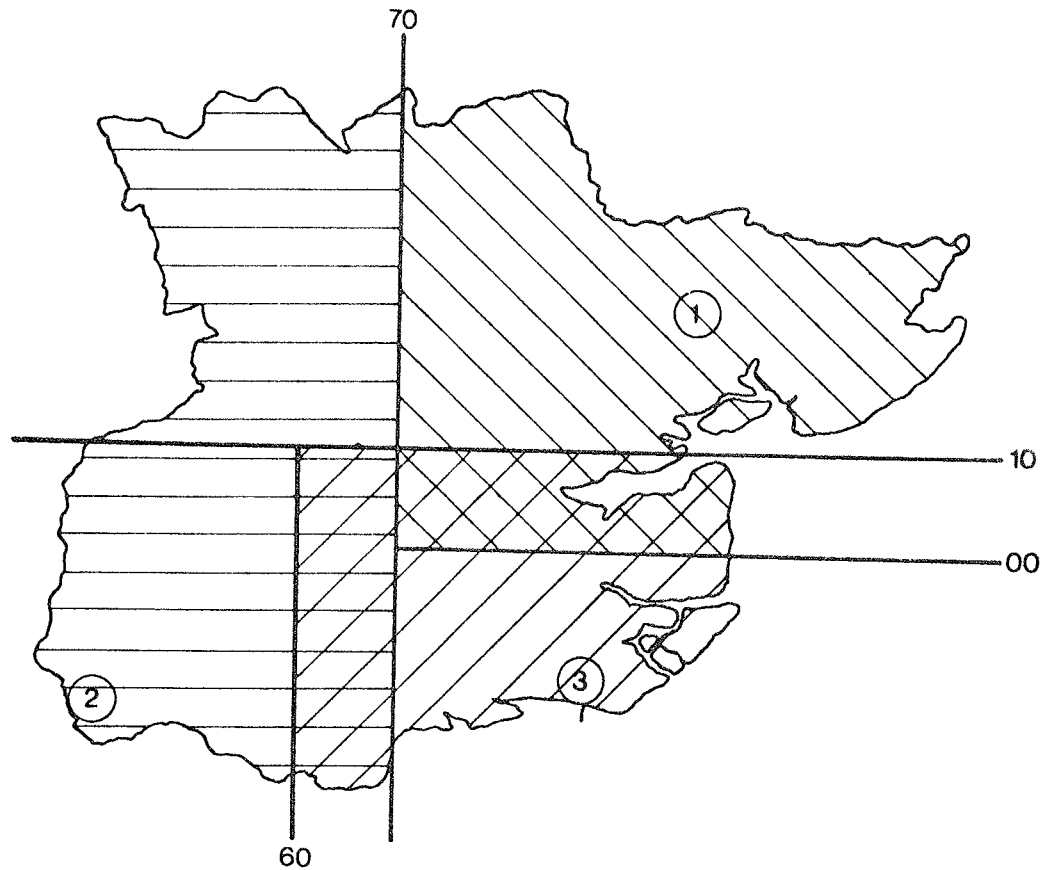
GRIZZLED SKIPPER *Pyrgus malvae* Linn.

Very localised and rare. It is found in dry grassy places, hillsides, railway banks, heathland and open woodland. Like the Dingy Skipper with which it often flies, it is easily overlooked and may be under-recorded. The larvae feed on Wild Strawberry, Barren Strawberry, Creeping Cinquefoil and Raspberry. Its flight period is from May to June.



ESSEX BIOLOGICAL RECORDS CENTRES

Areas of active recording ;



1 Colchester Museum Nat.Hist.Dept.,High St.Colchester.
Tel.Colchester 77475

2 Passmore Edwards Museum Romford Rd.,
Stratford,London,E15 4LZ.
Tel.01-534 4545 Ext.376

3 Southend-on-Sea Central Museum
Victoria Ave.Southend on Sea.SS2 6EX
Tel.Southend 330214

Other centres covering smaller areas at Epping Forest Conservation Centre,High Beach,
Loughton,(01-5087714) and Parndon Wood Nature Reserve,Harlow Council,
Parndon Wood Rd.,Harlow, (Harlow 30005).